

Managing Anxiety, Storms & Fireworks

Storms and fireworks can occur unexpectedly, and for these events it is important to have tools that can provide your fearful dog with some immediate relief. This handout aims to provide you with some helpful information for immediate treatment of firework and thunderstorm phobias.

Dogs with extreme fears and phobias often show improvement when a behavior modification technique known as systematic desensitization and counter-conditioning is used. Although they may not be fully cured, their level of fear can usually be reduced.

For a desensitization technique to be effective, the level of exposure to the sound should be carefully controlled and full intensity should be avoided. Ideally, it is best to begin this training at a time of year when fireworks or thunderstorms are not likely to occur. Many dogs with fears and phobias also benefit from the use of anxiety reducing medications.

Will drugs help relieve my dog's fear?

Although drugs may be useful in some cases, they should only be given under veterinary supervision. To be effective, they must be absorbed and active in the body **BEFORE** any noise starts or panic sets in. Most anti-anxiety medications need to be given at least an hour prior to an anticipated event. In some cases, if your dog is very agitated, a sedative may also be prescribed. Using a sedative without also using anxiety-reducing medication is not recommended - a sleepy dog may still be a very anxious dog.

In preparation for the storm or firework season, your veterinarian may also recommend using medication on a daily basis, such as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. Ongoing medication may reduce the fear response during an unexpected event and improve the effectiveness of a shorter-acting medication given on the day of the fireworks or storm. Other possible treatments to use in combination with medications include dog appeasing pheromones (Adaptil®) and natural products such as melatonin.

Should I try to reassure my dog?

It is best not to fuss over your dog if he is frightened. If your dog seeks your company, try to provide a comfortable surface such as a fleece mat or blanket close to your own seat, or allow them to lean on your legs. Some dogs appear to gain comfort when a person quietly puts an arm around them, while other dogs struggle with this type of 'restraint'.

What can I do to help my dog?

When all is quiet, practice training your dog to settle on a blanket or bed. Use rewards such as favorite treats or gentle massage. Do this training somewhere in the house where the noise of fireworks or storms are less obvious, or in a room your dog has already favored when attempting to settle during a noise event. During training, play some background music that can serve as a cue to relax and also help muffle the sounds during a real event. Over time, the location, the bed, and the music should signal it is time to relax. Then, during a real storm, bring your dog to the safe place.

"If there is a real storm or firework event, do not confine your dog unless you are able to remain with him or monitor him from another area of the house."

This **safe settle spot** can also be the location where you practice your desensitization and counterconditioning training. Setting up a gate can help your dog adjust to the new settle space; however, many dogs panic when confined during a storm. If there is a real storm or firework event, do not confine your dog unless you are able to remain with him or monitor him from another area of the house. Release him from the gated space if he begins to pace or attempts to escape.

What can I do to reduce the impact of fireworks or storms on my dog?

Curtains or opaque window coverings can be used to improve your dog's comfort in his safe room. With successful settle training, some dogs may rest on their beds until the storm has passed. If your dog is very playful, bring some favorite toys to the room, but do not repeatedly coax him to play - he may prefer to rest quietly.

Provide background noise from the radio or television. Music with constant drumbeats, such as rap or hip-hop may be most helpful. The volume does not have to be loud as long as the music has a strong beat that acts as a distraction. Other background noises such as fans and "white" noise devices can also be used. It is important to close all the windows and doors in the house so the outside sounds are muffled as much as possible.

Is there anything else that I can do during a storm?

Anxiety wraps such as the Thundershirt™ are designed to help dogs relax and are worth trying. Pheromone products such as Adaptil® can reduce anxiety and are available as diffusers. They can also be applied directly to your dog's bedding.

Some dogs, particularly those with a lower level of fear, find playing so rewarding that they can be fully distracted. If your dog has a play pal that is not afraid of storms, you may even invite the pal over for a playdate when a storm is anticipated.

Do not ignore your dog's fear of fireworks or storms because it is only seasonal; it can get worse year after year. Prepare to start a desensitization program at the end of a fireworks or storm season. Ask our team for an emailed handout "Introduction to Desensitization and Counterconditioning".

CBD and CBDA: Benefits in dogs and cats have ranged from anxiety and behavior issues, pain management, and arthritis. Choose a FULL-SPECTRUM CBD to have the best chance of achieving benefit for your pet. We carry 2 different Full-Spectrum CBD products: 1) **CannaChews** and 2) **ElleVet soft gels**. Ask our team for more information on these products.

L-THEANINE: Should be given on a regular basis to achieve a calming effect. L-Theanine is readily available online and in pharmacies. The active form of L-Theanine listed on the bottle is Suntheanine. You can find it in capsule form or liquid.

- Start with once a day dosing (general guideline) for dosing:
- 0-10# - 50mg every 8 to 12 hours if needed
- 10-20# - 100mg every 8 to 12 hours if needed
- 20-40# - 200mg every 8 to 12 hours if needed
- 40-60# - 300mg every 8 to 12 hours if needed
- 60-80# - 400mg every 8 to 12 hours if needed
- 80+# - 500mg every 8 to 12 hours if needed